NOSAS
North of Scotland Archaeological Society

OS Explorer map – 418 and 403, **NGR -** NH 848238 to NH 875213
Length - 9kms, **Ascent** – 120m, **Grade** – Moderate

Slochd Pass accommodates several routes old and new; 4 roads and a railway jostle for position through the narrow defile; in addition a new dual carriageway is currently under construction. This walk takes in sections of the two earliest roads; the first kilometre is along a road constructed in 1803 by James Donaldson *(see box),* but the majority of the walk follows General Wade's military road of 1728-1729 *(see box)*, much of this is part of the National Cycle Network.

The Route Start at Slochd Cottages NH 848238 where there is ample parking. The 1803 road descends northwest from the gate and after 400m crosses the Allt Slochd Muick at "Donaldsons Bridge", at NH 8434 2410 (HC HER: MHG25005). This bridge survived intact until the 1960s but has been replaced by a wooden structure which is currently in a precarious state; if the burn is low the bridge can be avoided by crossing downstream. (**Please note**; to avoid the bridge if the burn is in spate an alternative start 500m north of Slochd Cottages at NH 843244 is suggested. From this start follow the old "Parliamentary road" northwards; it was constructed in the 1830s under the supervision of Joseph Mitchell. Turn south onto the Wade road after 600m at NH 840250).

To continue from Donaldson's bridge follow an overgrown well graded road north noting a culvert at NH 8427 2423

Section of Wade road from Slochd to Insharn

First Edition OS map 1867-71 with old routes highlighted

••••••	Wade road 1728-29
••••••	Telford road 1830s
••••••	Donaldsons road 1801-03
———	Railway 1897
▭	Limekiln

and a further small bridge now fallen at NH 8422 2428. After 500m the Wade road is joined at NH 840246, the faint remains of an earlier line is seen to the north taking a direct line over the hill, the more recent road contouring around it. Turn south onto the Wade road and follow it for 1km, noting how its straight line has been interrupted by the construction of the railway in 1897. The original building at Ortunan is marked on the Taylor and Skinner map of 1776 *(see map)* as "Slockmuick" and was possibly an inn; the bridge (Canmore ID: 14978) here was recently rebuilt. Much of the landscape around Ortunan is marginal ground which has

been "improved" and the ruins of several settlements with "limekilns" can be seen *(see First Edition OS map left and also box).* Continue for a further 1.5kms to Insharn taking a small diversion to one of the limekilns at NH 8403 2260; it lies 100m south of the settlement of Torbreck and 50m to the west of the road in quite dense forestry. The bridge at Insharn *(right)* (Canmore ID: 11180) is built of dressed stone and may not be the original.

From Insharn the next section of road has been heavily used by estate vehicles, but after the junction with the track to Inverlaidnan it improves. Inverlaidnan has a number of interesting archaeological sites *(see box)* and a detour is worthwhile although it adds an extra 1 km to the walk. To rejoin the Wade road from Inverlaidnan head north from the farmhouse through a gate; a track climbs the hill and crosses the field becoming a path which is boggy at times.

If continuing along the Wade road from the junction with the Inverlaidnan track a five-mile marker stone *(right)*, NH 8575 2176 is seen after 200m and further along, about 30m north of the road and rapidly becoming overgrown with juniper, a cairn and cist at NH 8642 2208 (HC HER ID: MHG25012); this is a sub-circular ringed

earthwork with a short cist and capstone at its centre. Nearby is a site which has several stone built "plinths" thought to be supports for a temporary sawmill and perhaps the workplace of "Alexander Robertson, sawmiller, Sluggan" in the census records for 1861 and 1871. As the Wade road descends towards Sluggan Bridge an alternative line taking an easier gradient is seen in the heather to the north. Just before the bridge the road is joined by the old "Caulfield" road from Grantown *(marked on the T&S 1776 map).* This junction was the location of an inn *(see box)* in the 18th Century. Admire the fine form of Sluggan Bridge *(see box)*, an excellent spot for a rest before continuing SE to the final climb which zig-zags up the slope to the finish; on your left the original Wade road takes a direct line straight up the slope. Those with time and energy may consider continuing along Wade's road for a further 5kms to Kinveachy.

Construction of Roads in the Highlands – 1724 to 1863

Military Roads, 1724 to 1800 – In the aftermath of the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 and 1719, the Hanoverian Government set in place the means for the policing of the Highlands. General George Wade, appointed Commander of the Forces in North Britain, was keenly aware of the need for improved communications, especially the provision of roads to link the chain of fortified garrisons. Over the eight years between 1725 and 1733, Wade's squads built over 250 miles of roadway and around 40 stone bridges. This network primarily linked the three forts of the Great Glen with Ruthven in Badenoch and fed into a road from the south across the Drumochter Pass.

The roads were designed for military use wherever possible following the Roman precedent of straight lines going over rather than round high ground. Edmund Burt, who in 1725 had been appointed to administer the government accounts of the "Forfeited Estates", tells us that:

"work on the roads was carried out entirely by military labour with 300 to 500 men being employed. …….The road making was done between May and October…. The standard width of the road was 16 ft but this varied considerably. Where soft ground had to be crossed the foundations were made of successive layers of stone of diminishing size, the top layer and the surface being gravel. Gunpowder was used for rocky ground. The earth thrown up during excavation was formed into a bank on each side of the road, and these can still be seen in places. Drainage trenches were dug on each side of the banks; where the road clung to a hillside, the back drain was essential to keep the surface from being washed away. At first rivers and streams were crossed by fords but later, because these were liable to be obliterated by floods, many bridges became necessary".

Little survives of Wade's original roads; they have been improved, widened and resurfaced. One of the finest stretches of surviving roadway runs from Garvamore to the Corrieyairick, where it ascends the steep hillside in a series of dramatic switchbacks. A second well-preserved stretch runs north from Kinveachy, via Sluggan Bridge to the Slochd Pass. Many of Wade's bridges were also replaced in the 18th or 19th centuries, but several good original examples survive. Most were built of undressed stone and were simple, utilitarian structures. The finest of this type is Garva Bridge, at the foot of the long ascent towards the Corrieyairick.

A second great road-building phase began in 1740 and continued with interruptions until 1790. This was carried out under the direction of Wade's former assistant, Major William Caulfield until 1767. Caulfield's roads were generally better than Wade's, and were laid out with better awareness of the lie of the land. Towards the end of the 18th C the government was more reluctant to allow funding for the maintenance of the roads and fewer military personnel were available. By 1790 a further 1000 miles of military road and 936 bridges had been constructed throughout Scotland; much of the work however was poorly executed and by 1800 many of the roads were in bad repair.

"Parliamentary" Roads, 1803 to 1863 - The fear of further Jacobite risings had evaporated by this time and military considerations did not always match with the needs of local people. The government felt that the provision of roads, bridges, canals and harbours would be a prerequisite to prosperity in the Highlands. In 1802 they instructed Thomas Telford to make a survey of the roads and the Commission for Highland Roads and Bridges was established. The Government would pay half the expense of the roads and bridges, the other half was to be met by landlords and others who might benefit. It had been proved time and again that without regular maintenance Highland roads deteriorated rapidly, provision should be made for proper repairs. Despite government penny-pinching, hostility from local lairds, and the difficulties of geography, by 1820 Telford had added 1320km of high-quality road and over 1000 new bridges, much of the early work was supervised by John Mitchell and later his son Joseph Mitchell.

Brief History of the roads through Slochd

A north-south route through Slochd had almost certainly been in existence for centuries

Edmund Burt in his "Letters from the North of Scotland" (1726), writes

"At length I arrived at the spot….found it most horrible but…..being the shortest cut going southwards it is not to be avoided….. This is a deep narrow hollow between very steep mountains into which huge parts of rocks have fallen. It is a terrifying sight to those who are not accustomed to such views and at the bottom is a small but dangerous burn running wildly among the rocks …….
The name Slock Moach is interpreted by the natives (as) "a den of hogs", having been a noted harbour for thieves who in numbers lay in wait within that narrow and deep cavity to commit their depredations upon cattle and passengers………

Three Old Roads traverse the defile *(see also box "Construction of Roads in the Highlands")*

- The Wade Military road constructed in 1728-29 to link the garrisons of Inverness (the original Fort George) with Ruthven (Kingussie) and the south

- A military road constructed in 1801-1803 by James Donaldson and funded by Sir James Grant of Grant. It linked with a new road between Carrbridge and the new Fort George over the Dava Moor and avoided some of the steep gradients of the old Wade road. Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus in her "Memoirs of a Highland Lady Volume 1", 1814, writes *"a new road has been engineered along the sides of this "pass of wild boars", Slough Mouich, thought a wonder of skill when viewed beside the frightful narrow precipitous pathway tracked out by General Wade, up and down which one could scarcely be made to believe a carriage with people sitting in it had ever attempted to pass. My mother had always walked those 2 or 3 miles, the new route not having been completed until some years after."*

- A "Parliamentary road" built in the 1830s under the supervision of Joseph Mitchell. Some realignment of the road was needed when the railway was constructed in 1897 but apart from this Mitchells road continued in use as the main N-S road until the 1970s

Associated Archaeology

The railway viaduct (Canmore ID: 14977) near Slochd corrages was built in 1897 by Murdoch Paterson when the railway was taken to Inverness from Aviemore by a shorter higher route. It is 140m long and has 8 arches.

The remains of six settlements, many with "limekilns" and "improved" land are seen on the south facing slopes around Ortunan at the west end of the viaduct. These were part of the drive towards "Improvement" in the 18th and 19[th]C when landowners tried to organise their estates so that they would give a better revenue. The cultivated land was turned over to large enclosed farms and the displaced people were given marginal ground which they were expected to bring into fertility. The settlements at Ortunan are marked on an estate plan of 1808 *(NRS RHP13916) a*nd the Old Statistical Account for the parish of Duthil 1792 tells us that;

"the letting *(of)* small improvements towards the skirts of the hills called Hill-improvement all concur as causes of great alteration in the customs and style of living of the inhabitants within these 20 years."

By 1839 the NSA has;

"a considerable quantity of waste ground has been brought into culture".

By the time of the First Edition OS map, 1867-71, some of the settlements had been deserted the OS Namebook describing those that remain roofed as;
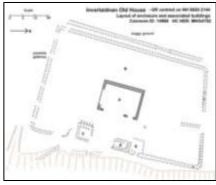
"small farmsteadings *(of)* one story……. all thatched with heather and in a bad state of repair".

Ortunan appears to have been a long established settlement; it is marked on early maps *(see Taylor and Skinner map of 1776)* as "Slock Muick" and may have been an inn.

Inverlaidnan has a number of interesting archaeological sites the earliest being a prehistoric round house located at NH 8597 216 with a field system of clearance cairns *(possibly enhanced by later activity)*. **Inverlaidnan Old House -** GR NH 861 214, Canmore ID: 14968 dates to c1717 when John Grant of Dalrachney took a long lease of the lands. The house was a typical "lairds house" but it was extensively damaged by fire in 1739. It was rebuilt by 1746 when Bonnie Prince Charlie stayed on the night of 15th February just a few weeks before Culloden. By 1851 the roof of the house is reported as having fallen in and today the N and W walls only are upstanding. The site is of interest because the footings of the surrounding walled enclosure and the associated buildings within it are still extant. These features are depicted on the Roy map of c1750 *(right)*. Flooding of the burn on the west side may have caused the early abandonment of the house and the double banks of the enclosure on this side may have been an attempt to alleviate this.

Please Note –The building is in an unstable condition please do not enter, most of its features can be seen from outside anyway.

The remains of several other features marked on the 18thC maps are still extant – the wall surrounding the policies, the lade running parallel to the Allt an Aonaich, centred on NH 8611 2104 *(the mill is very wasted)* and a township at NH 8599 2147, rapidly becoming overgrown with juniper bushes, on the terrace above and to the NW of the Old House. Inverlaidnan was an "Improved" farm; an estate map of 1860 shows enclosure of the arable land and a typical steading of the time. Much of this building has disappeared but to the SW of the present farmhouse the circular platform of a horse gang is seen close to a building – the horse would have walked in circles powering an underground shaft which drove a threshing machine in the barn next door. In 1916 Inverlaidnan was chosen as the location for a WW1 POW camp (Canmore ID: 332704, HC HER: MHG58787); it was built on the river terrace nearby to accommodate 400 German POWs who provided the labour force for the Canadian Forestry Corps. All that remains of the camp is a dump of debris pushed over the edge of the terrace at NH 8611 2107. For more information on the archaeology and history of Inverlaidnan see the report of a recent survey on the NOSAS website – nosas.co.uk

Above Top – Inverlaidnan House,
Middle – Roy map c1750,
Bottom – recent survey of banks.
Below – a typical Lairds House, this one in Fife

Sluggan/Inchluin - North of Sluggan Bridge the remains of a substantial building, NH 8693 2208, (Canmore ID: 356385 HC HER MHG30501) are at the junction of the Wade road and the Grantown road *(see T&S map of 1776)*; they probably overly a previous building which in 1706 is described as an inn. Other documents refer to an inn here in the late 18thC and the early maps show several associated buildings at this site *(see estate plan below)* – two platforms to the north of the ruin may have held timber buildings. By 1803 Sluggan, its bridge and the Inn had been bypassed by the new Donaldson road.

The building on the S side of the river is relatively recent; it first appears on the 2nd edition of the OS map 1903. The 1st edition OS map 1861-1875 has two farmsteads, North and South Inchluin at Sluggan/Inchluin. The footings of a building at NH 8708 2196 under a tree on the east side of the road are all that remains of North Inchluin. South Inchluin NH 8701 2175 (HC HER: MHG25007) however has the remains of 3 buildings and an enclosure, it is seen in the birchwood above and to the south of the cottage. A large corn drying kiln at NH 8703 2188 on top of the knoll beside the cottage probably served the grain drying needs of the 2 settlements. In 1867 the Ordnance Survey Namebook describes the buildings at Inchluin as "very small farmhouses in miserable condition".

Sluggan Bridge NH 870220 (Canmore ID 14972, HC HER: MHG4465) carries the military road across the River Dulnain. Bishop Forbes when he travelled north describes fording the river here in 1762. The first bridge was built in 1764 with two arches and a central pier, but the pier was demolished in a flood of 1768 and the bridge was washed away. It was replaced a year later by the present single soaring arch "the builder being resolved that the same accident should never happen again" *(Sir Eneas MacIntosh, 23rd Chief of the Clan)*.

Above – Taylor and Skinner map 1760
Above right – extract from estate plan of 1808 NRS RHP13921 showing the bridge and the buildings at Sluggan Inn
Below right – Sluggan Bridge